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NOQOÏLPI,¹ THE GAMBLER: A NAVAJO MYTH.

IN the cañon of the Chaco, in northern New Mexico, there are many ruins of ancient pueblos which are still in a fair state of preservation, in some of them entire apartments being yet, it is said, intact. One of the largest of these is called by the Navajos Kintyèl or Kintyèli, which signifies "Broad-house." It figures frequently in their legends and is the scene of a very interesting rite-myth, which I have in my collection. I have reason to believe that this pueblo is identical with that seen and described in 1849 by Lieut. J. H. Simpson, U. S. A.,² under the name of *Pueblo Chettro Kettle*. Although his guide translated this "Rain Pueblo," it seems more probably a corruption of the Navajo Tseçqa or Tceçqa (Englished Chethra) Kintyèl, or Broad House among the Cliffs, — *i. e.* in the cañon. This story of Noqoilpi was not related to me as a separate tale, but as a part of the great creation and migration legend of the Navajos. When the wandering Navajos arrived at Kintyèli, this great pueblo was in process of building, but was not finished. The way it came to be built was this: —

Some time before, there had descended among the Pueblos, from the heavens, a divine gambler or gambling-god, named Noqoilpi, or He-who-wins-men (at play); his talisman was a great piece of turquoise. When he came, he challenged the people to all sorts of games and contests, and in all of these he was successful. He won from them, first their property, then their women and children, and finally some of the men themselves. Then he told them he would give them part of their property back in payment if they would build a great house; so when the Navajos came, the Pueblos were busy build-

¹ In spelling the Navajo words the alphabet of the Bureau of Ethnology is used; *l* is aspirated.

² In *Journal of a Military Reconnoissance from Santa Fé, New Mexico, to the Navajo Country*, etc., Ex. Doc. No. 64, 31st Congress, 1st Session [Senate], "Reports of the Secretary of War," etc., Washington, 1850, p. 79.

ing, in order that they might release their enthralled relatives and their property. They were also busy making a race-track, and preparing for all kinds of games of chance and skill.

When all was ready, and four days' notice had been given, twelve men came from the neighboring pueblo of Kinçolij (Blue-house) to compete with the great gambler. They bet their own persons, and after a brief contest they lost themselves to Noqoilpi. Again a notice of four days was given, and again twelve men of Kinçolij — relatives of the former twelve — came to play, and these also lost themselves. For the third time an announcement, four days in advance of a game, was given; this time some women were among the twelve contestants, and they too lost themselves. All were put to work on the building of Kintyèli as soon as they forfeited their liberty. At the end of another four days the children of these men and women came to try to win back their parents, but they succeeded only in adding themselves to the number of the gambler's slaves. On a fifth trial, after four days' warning, twelve leading men of Blue-house were lost, among them the chief of the pueblo. On a sixth duly announced gambling-day twelve more men, all important persons, staked their liberty and lost it. Up to this time the Navajos had kept count of the winnings of Noqoilpi, but afterwards people from other pueblos came in such numbers to play and lose that they could keep count no longer. In addition to their own persons the later victims brought in beads, shells, turquoise, and all sorts of valuables, and gambled them away. With the labor of all these slaves it was not long until the great Kintyèli was finished.

But all this time the Navajos had been merely spectators, and had taken no part in the games. One day the voice of the beneficent god Qastcèyalçi was heard faintly in the distance crying his usual call "hu' hu' hu' hu'." His voice was heard, as it is always heard, four times, each time nearer and nearer, and immediately after the last call, which was loud and clear, Qastcèyalçi appeared at the door of a hut where dwelt a young couple who had no children, and with them he communicated by means of signs. He told them that the people of Kinçolij had lost at game with Noqoilpi two great shells, the greatest treasures of the pueblo; that the Sun had coveted these shells, and had begged them from the gambler; that the latter had refused the request of the Sun and the Sun was angry. In consequence of all this, as Qastcèyalçi related, in twelve days from his visit certain divine personages would meet in the mountains, in a place which he designated, to hold a great ceremony. He invited the young man to be present at the ceremony, and disappeared.

The Navajo kept count of the passing days; on the twelfth day he repaired to the appointed place, and there he found a great assem-

blage of the gods. There were Qastcèyalçi, Qastcèqogan and his son, Níltci, the Wind, Tcalyèl, the Darkness, Tcàapani, the Bat, Kliłtsò, the Great Snake, Tsilkàli (a little bird), Nasísi, the Gopher, and many others. Beside these, there were present a number of pets or domesticated animals belonging to the gambler, who were dissatisfied with their lot, were anxious to be free, and would gladly obtain their share of the spoils in case their master was ruined. Níltci, the Wind, had spoken to them, and they had come to enter into the plot against Noqòilpi. All night the gods danced and sang, and performed their mystic rites, for the purpose of giving to the son of Qastcèqogan powers as a gambler equal to those of Noqòilpi. When the morning came they washed the young neophyte all over, dried him with meal, dressed him in clothes exactly like those the gambler wore, and in every way made him look as much like the gambler as possible, and then they counselled as to what other means they should take to outwit Noqòilpi.

In the first place, they desired to find out how he felt about having refused to his father, the Sun, the two great shells. "I will do this," said Níltci, the Wind, "for I can penetrate everywhere, and no one can see me;" but the others said, "No, you can go everywhere, but you cannot travel without making a noise and disturbing people. Let Tcalyèl, the Darkness, go on this errand, for he also goes wherever he wills, yet he makes no noise." So Tcalyèl went to the gambler's house, entered his room, went all through his body while he slept, and searched well his mind, and he came back saying, "Noqòilpi is sorry for what he has done." Níltci, however, did not believe this; so, although his services had been before refused, he repaired to the chamber where the gambler slept, and went all through his body and searched well his mind; but he too came back saying Noqòilpi was sorry that he had refused to give the great shells to his father.

One of the games they proposed to play is called *çàka-çqadsàça*, or the thirteen chips; it is played with thirteen thin flat pieces of wood, which are colored red on one side and left white or uncolored on the other side. Success depends on the number of chips, which, being thrown upward, fall with their white sides up. "Leave the game to me," said the Bat; "I have made thirteen chips that are white on both sides. I will hide myself in the ceiling, and when our champion throws up his chips I will grasp them and throw down my chips instead."

Another game they were to play is called *na'joj*; it is played with two long sticks or poles, of peculiar shape and construction (one marked with red and the other with black), and a single hoop. A long many-tailed string, called the "turkey-claw," is secured to the centre of each pole. "Leave *na'joj* to me," said the Great Snake; "I will hide myself in the hoop and make it fall where I please."

Another game was one called tsínbetsil, or push-on-the-wood ; in this the contestants push against a tree until it is torn from its roots and falls. "I will see that this game is won," said Nasísi, the Gopher ; "I will gnaw the roots of the tree, so that he who shoves it may easily make it fall."

In the game of tcol, or ball, the object was to hit the ball so that it would fall beyond a certain line. "I will win this game for you," said the little bird, Tsilkáli, "for I will hide within the ball, and fly with it wherever I want to go. Do not hit the ball hard ; give it only a light tap, and depend on me to carry it."

The pets of the gambler begged the Wind to blow hard, so that they might have an excuse to give their master for not keeping due watch when he was in danger, and in the morning the Wind blew for them a strong gale. At dawn the whole party of conspirators left the mountain, and came down to the brow of the cañon to watch until sunrise.

Noqoilpi had two wives, who were the prettiest women in the whole land. Wherever she went, each carried in her hand a stick with something tied on the end of it, as a sign that she was the wife of the great gambler.

It was their custom for one of them to go every morning at sunrise to a neighboring spring to get water. So at sunrise the watchers on the brow of the cliff saw one of the wives coming out of the gambler's house with a water-jar on her head, whereupon the son of Qastcèqogan descended into the cañon, and followed her to the spring. She was not aware of his presence until she had filled her water-jar ; then she supposed it to be her own husband, whom the youth was dressed and adorned to represent, and she allowed him to approach her. She soon discovered her error, however, but deeming it prudent to say nothing, she suffered him to follow her into the house. As he entered, he observed that many of the slaves had already assembled ; perhaps they were aware that some trouble was in store for their master. The latter looked up with an angry face ; he felt jealous when he saw the stranger entering immediately after his wife. He said nothing of this, however, but asked at once the important question, "Have you come to gamble with me ?" This he repeated four times, and each time the young Qastcèqogan said "No." Thinking the stranger feared to play with him, Noqoilpi went on challenging him recklessly. "I'll bet myself against yourself ;" "I'll bet my feet against your feet ;" "I'll bet my legs against your legs ;" and so on he offered to bet every and any part of his body against the same part of his adversary, ending by mentioning his hair.

In the mean time the party of divine ones, who had been watching from above, came down, and people from the neighboring pueblos

came in, and among these were two boys, who were dressed in costumes similar to those worn by the wives of the gambler. The young Qastcèqogan pointed to these and said, "I will bet my wives against your wives." The great gambler accepted the wager, and the four persons, two women and two mock women, were placed sitting in a row near the wall. First they played the game of thirteen chips. The Bat assisted, as he had promised the son of Qastcèqogan, and the latter soon won the game, and with it the wives of Noqòilpi.

This was the only game played inside the house ; then all went out of doors, and games of various kinds were played. First they tried na"joj. The track already prepared lay east and west, but, prompted by the wind god, the stranger insisted on having a track made from north to south, and again, at the bidding of the Wind, he chose the red stick. The son of Qastcèqogan threw the wheel : at first it seemed about to fall on the gambler's pole, in the "turkey-claw" of which it was entangled ; but to the great surprise of the gambler it extricated itself, rolled farther on, and fell on the pole of his opponent. The latter ran to pick up the ring, lest Noqòilpi in doing so might hurt the Snake inside ; but the gambler was so angry that he threw his stick away and gave up the game, hoping to do better in the next contest, which was that of pushing down trees.

For this the great gambler pointed out two small trees, but his opponent insisted that larger trees must be found. After some search they agreed upon two of good size, which grew close together, and of these the wind-god told the youth which one he must select. The gambler strained with all his might at his tree, but could not move it, while his opponent, when his turn came, shoved the other tree prostrate with little effort, for its roots had all been severed by the Gopher.

Then followed a variety of games, on which Noqòilpi staked his wealth in shells and precious stones, his houses, and many of his slaves, and lost all.

The last game was that of the ball. On the line over which the ball was to be knocked all the people were assembled : on one side were those who still remained slaves ; on the other side were the freedmen and those who had come to wager themselves, hoping to rescue their kinsmen. Noqòilpi bet on this game the last of his slaves and his own person. The gambler struck his ball a heavy blow, but it did not reach the line ; the stranger gave his but a light tap, and the bird within it flew with it far beyond the line, whereat the released captives jumped over the line and joined their people.

The victor ordered all the shell beads and precious stones and the great shells to be brought forth. He gave the beads and shells to

Qastcèyalçi, that they might be distributed among the gods ; the two great shells were given to the Sun.¹

In the mean time Noqoilpi sat to one side saying bitter things, bemoaning his fate, and cursing and threatening his enemies : " I will kill you all with the lightning. I will send war and disease among you. May the cold freeze you ! May the fire burn you ! May the waters drown you ! " he cried. " He has cursed enough," whispered Niltci to the son of Qastcèqogan. " Put an end to his angry words." So the young victor called Noqoilpi to him, and said, " You have bet yourself and have lost ; you are now my slave and must do my bidding. You are not a god, for my power has prevailed against yours." The victor had a bow of magic power named Eçiⁿ Çilyil, or the Bow of Darkness : he bent this upwards, and placing the string on the ground, he bade his illustrious slave stand on the string ; then he shot Noqoilpi up into the sky as if he had been an arrow. Up and up he went, growing smaller and smaller to the sight till he faded to a mere speck, and finally disappeared altogether. As he flew upwards he was heard to mutter in the angry tones of abuse and imprecation, until he was too far away to be heard ; but no one could distinguish anything he said as he ascended.

He flew up in the sky until he came to the home of Bekotcize, the god who carries the moon, and who is supposed by the Navajos to be identical with the god of the Americans. He is very old, and dwells in a long row of stone houses. When Noqoilpi arrived at the house of Bekotcize, he related to the latter all his misadventures in the lower world and said, " Now I am poor, and this is why I have come to see you." " You need be poor no longer," said Bekotcize ; " I will provide for you." So he made for the gambler pets or domestic animals of new kinds, different to those which he had in the Chaco valley ; he made for him sheep, asses, horses, swine, goats, and fowls. He also gave him *bayeta*, and other cloths of bright colors, more beautiful than those woven by his slaves at Kintyèli. He made, too, a new people, the Mexicans, for the gambler to rule over, and then he sent him back to this world again, but he descended far to the south of his former abode, and reached the earth in old Mexico.

Noqoilpi's people increased greatly in Mexico, and after a while they began to move toward the north, and build towns along the Rio Grande. Noqoilpi came with them until they arrived at a place north of Santa Fé. There they ceased building, and he returned to old Mexico, where he still lives, and where he is now the Nakai Çigini, or God of the Mexicans.

Washington Matthews.

¹ What finally became of these great shells is ingeniously told in another myth.